Twisted
FATES
A Ninjago roleswitch au

Step closer to the mirror and you'll find the familiar world of Ninjago where destinies have been rewritten.

The once familiar realm got turned upside down in which the once noble heroes now enforce fear and control. The villains they once vanquished have become defenders of freedom and peace.

Watch closely as the stories you once knew get twisted into something else entirely…

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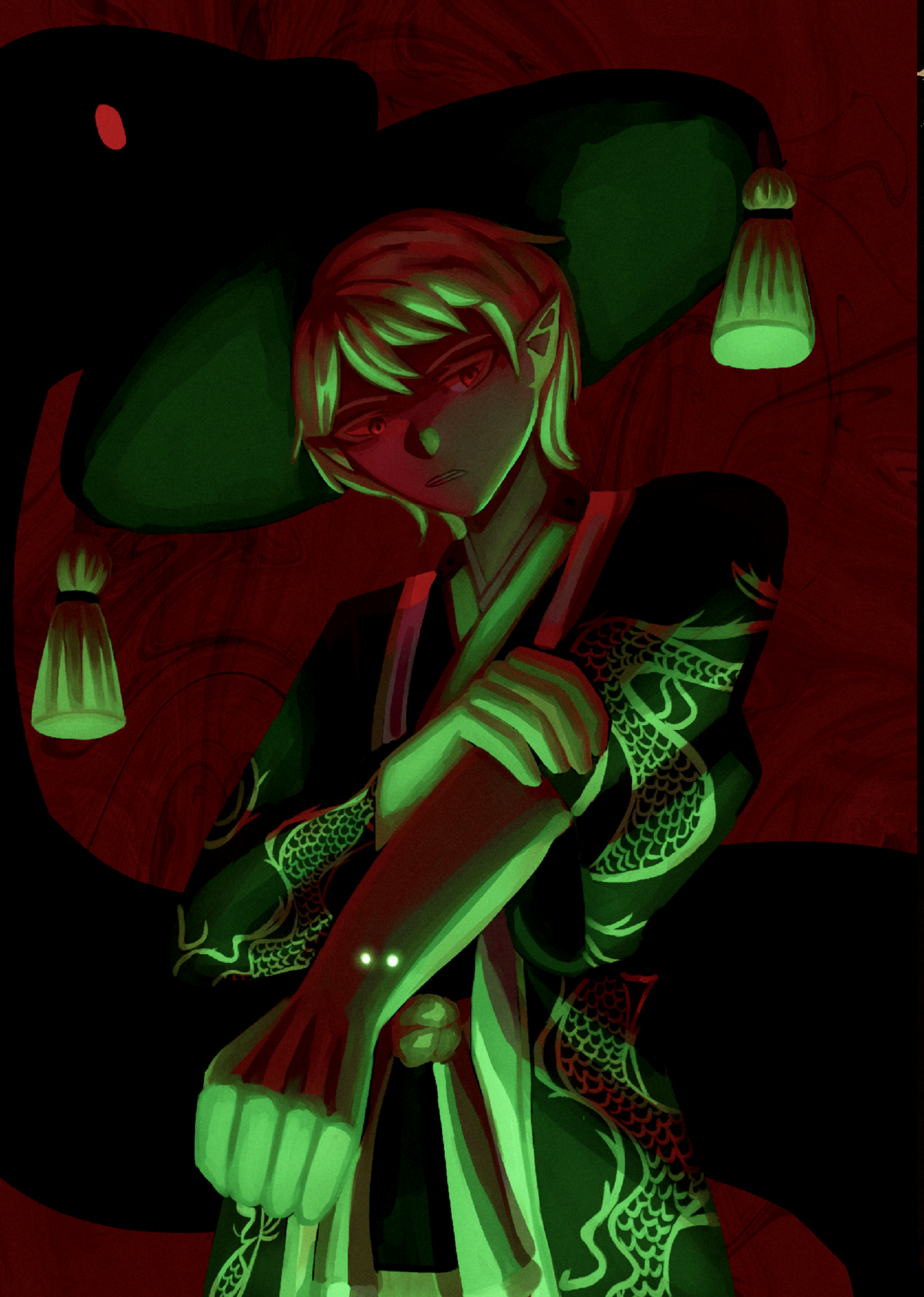


L Y N
lynblord

The Good One

art © zayrenvie

@riicahr

This Snake Empire doesn't run itself

Written by Asyisnotok I Illustrated by Riicahr

Lloyd was an idiot. Or maybe just plain stupid. It was SUPPOSED to be easy. He ran through it several times over in his head on the way to the site. The plan was insanely, stupidly easy. Even one of the Constricti cronies could follow it, and they weren't exactly known for being the sharpest fang in the mouth. Yeah, it was that simple.

Which is why it's so frustrating when everything fails miserably. Lloyd is supposed to be the best of the best. He was raised under Pythor, after all. It doesn't make sense that so many things would go topsy-turvy at once.

But no. The universe hated Lloyd since the moment he was born. It hated him, and took away his father. It hated him, and so his mother hated him too. It hated him, and so Lloyd was stuck doing Pythor's dirty work because that snake could do literally anything but the tasks he needs to do to keep this whole "Snake Empire" thing running.

Lloyd sighs. All this means is that he's gonna have to do damage control, which is really just horrible, AND get yelled at on top of it all. For a thirteen-year-old upcoming supervillain, he has a lot of clean-up to do.

The red ninja (Lloyd forgot his name) sends another reball his way, which singes the tail of his cape as he dodges out of the way and doesn't really do much except make him angrier. He sends an array of shuriken in retaliation. A gust of frosty wind intercepts the attack and leaves them buried deep in a wall of ice.

Irritated, Lloyd grips the fang blade strapped to his thigh. It glows faintly, a pale green that really doesn't seem to fit it. It hums beneath his finger, an energy none of the snakes even seem to notice or care about. But it's there. Untapped. Waiting.

His momentary distraction nearly leaves him fried to a crisp when a shock of lightning strikes the light pole at his back. The blue ninja is nowhere to be seen, but Lloyd knows his energy when he feels it.

He wonders if the others can feel it too. The weird, strange pulling sensation toward them like they have something he wants.

Like polarized magnets, whatever trait that lets him feel the energy of the fang blades lets him feel the energy of the other ninja, and strangely, the girl that tags along with them sometimes too. Lloyd knows it's not normal. He's too afraid to ask Pythor what it means.

The boy nearly trips over the bola wire the black ninja throws at his feet, tumbling into a roll as he tries to beat a hasty retreat. The desperation in his blood only mounts when he realizes the tell-tale hum of energy buzzing beneath his skin is something worse than adrenaline.

Forcing himself upright from the tumble, his mask slips off his face - it's not for longer than a second, and in the hurry of panic as he retreats he doesn't really think it matters all that much. Only the red ninja is close enough to see him, and he's still a little bit–

A large, crushing mass lands on his back. Lloyd is tackled to the ground like a sack of flour. The breath whooshes out of his lungs, the energy beneath his skin crackles violently, and his pulse thunders in his ears.

"I gotcha now, Greenie!" the red ninja says, evidently not where Lloyd last thought he was. This is bad. Like, really, really bad.

There's a hand pressing between his shoulder blades, the other grasping Lloyd's left hand in vice. The red ninja straddles him in a way Lloyd recognizes, from somewhere, but he can't place where. He can't breathe.

The tightness in his chest only constricts further. He can't breathe. The hands restraining him only get heavier, the lightning in his veins more spastic. He can't breathe. He can't breathe.

He can't breathe.

The sparks from beneath erupt from within him. In the seconds of eternity he can feel the weight of the man on top of him vanish. Momentarily, it feels like ecstasy. Lloyd is a caged bird finally stretching its wings.

Then the pain starts. It slithers into his chest and pulses angrily. His body begins to tremble, and his brain becomes foggy. This is what usually happens when these weird bursts come out – and it's no less fortunate that it happened in front of all the ninja, too.

Pythor's gonna kill me.

It's a genuine battle to get to his hands and knees. A Herculean effort to put one leg beneath himself and stand upright. Moving mountains would be easier.

Lloyd struggles to keep the mask on his face as he darts across the ravaged street and down an alley. He just barely misses the electric shock sent his way, which sears the corner of whatever building is there instead.

"Wait! Stop!" The red ninja shouts, on his feet already.

Lloyd clicks his tongue. Even if he hadn't wanted his powers to burst out like that, all it seemed to do was make the red guy more determined to catch him.

"Leave me alone!" Lloyd shouted. The alley opened into another street, one far less vacant than the previous. There were people hustling down the street, seeming unawares to the events taking place just a street away.

Lloyd quickly buried himself in a group of people crossing the street at a red light, elbowing his way into the middle. The people he shoved aside looked disgruntled, but other than that, did nothing to keep him from hiding within. Lloyd tugged the bandanna covering his mouth off and slipped out of his hood. Though he wasn't one to believe luck was on his side, he crossed his fingers and hoped that his small stature and young appearance would keep anyone from asking questions– and more importantly, get the stupid red ninja off his back.

There were shouts behind him as the other ninja caught up, and the happy blue one states the obvious; "I can't find him anywhere!!"

Lloyd risks a glance back just in time to see the earth ninja slap him upside the head.

Lloyd stifles a snort, even under duress. He likes how kind they are to each other. Maybe, in another life, Lloyd could've stayed with them and given noogies like that.

Lloyd crushes that squirmy little hopeful feeling blooming in his chest at the thought. There's no way they would ever love someone as twisted and hurt like him. He'd done such awful things. There's just no way.

He slides a hand into the pocket of his gi-slash-sweatpants and feels the warm, buzzing hilt of the Fang Blade. He still doesn't understand why its energy seems to call out to him like that, but it's a nice reminder that he'd done what Pythor asked of him. At least the mission wasn't a total bust.

The crowd of people thins. Lloyd turns down a slimmer alley and dons his mask again. He'll be fine. It'll all be fine.

And the universe must hate him. Truly, horribly, despise his very existence, because the moment Lloyd lets out a breath he didn't realize he'd been holding, the very second he tries to relax and calm down his raging heartbeat, something happens.

The sky must have split open. It's the only thing that can justify the horrible, cringing cracking sound that reverberates through Lloyd's skull down to his very toes. The earth beneath him trembles, and the world goes all lopsided– and suddenly, the building next to him doesn't look so sturdy anymore. In fact, Lloyd watches in real time as the glass windows of it shatter into millions of shards, and the spider-webbing of cracks trickling up its columns finally cave under the pressure.

And Lloyd must be stupid. He must be, because instead of running, or screaming, or trying to get away– really, just doing anything to try and save himself– he is stuck. Feet frozen to the ground, a million pounds weigh him down as the tenant building careens toward him.

This is it, he thinks. I'm dead.

"Are you an IDIOT?!" someone shouts. Lloyd is so busy trying to die that he didn't notice Red Ninja sneaking up on him– can it be called sneaking when he's shouting and running towards him like all hell's broken loose? Lloyd has barely enough time to gasp before Red has tackled him to the ground moments before the building comes crashing down. Strong, earthen pillars jag up out of the ground just before they get smashed; Lloyd's not entirely confident it'll be enough to save them.

The building finally crashes down with an earth-splitting sound, so loud and thunderous that Lloyd wonders if he'll ever hear anything again.

Afterwards, there's nothing. A dull, ringing sound reverberates within his skull as Lloyd struggles to breath. The red-clothed arm across his chest feels like it weighs two tons, and takes monumental effort to move. Someone coughs, a dry-ish sound that hurts Lloyd's lungs just to hear.

"Are you okay?" Is the first thing the hacking, trembling lump of red manages to ask him. Which is stupid, because Lloyd really doesn't mirror the sentiment, so he doesn't get why the red ninja even asked such a dumb question. Who would be okay after a building collapses on them?

In the darkness, an infernal flame flickers to life beside him. The heat is an instant shock, and Lloyd instinctively ducks his head further into his tattered mask to avoid it. The gasp of surprise just after the small cavern is illuminated is a little less devastating to the ringing in Lloyd's skull, but still irks.

Luckily, it seems that the major debris has missed him; the same cannot be said for the annoying ninja beside him. His brown hair is littered with dust and grime, the mask over his chin hanging on just barely by a thread, but his face is largely unmarred (if you ignore the long-healed scars that were already there). Looking further down, though, reveals that a massive pillar has crushed his other hand, and pinned Lloyd's enemy in place.

"I know you," the red ninja breathes, seemingly not aware of his injury just yet. In the light, his pupils are dilated to pinpricks– something to be said for the power of adrenaline, Lloyd surmises.

"No, you don't," Lloyd hastily lies, and scrabbles to put space between them. "I have no idea who you are."

"No, your face— I've seen you before, I know you—" Kai cuts himself off with a groan, and his awestruck face turns to see the damage on his arm. "Oh. That's gonna hurt."

Lloyd glances at the pinprick of light seeping into the weird rock tent they've found themselves under, and takes a chance. He licks his lips. "Yeah, it will."

Kai's confused face breaks into utter unconsciousness as Lloyd knocks him on the side of the head, just how Pythor showed him. The Fang Blade is warm against his thigh as he tries to claw his way out of the cavern. A seedling bit of dirt catches in his chest at the thought of leaving the ninja there, but it's washed away rather easily.

He makes his escape quick and painless, the Fang Blade still tucked carefully in his belt.

It wasn't Lloyd's fault they didn't care about him. He was better off without them, anyways.

Marsipain

Giving up the Ghost

Written by Weekend-whip

"Yes, good form Cole. Maintain your momentum."

Without breaking concentration, Cole preens under the praise of his master—an elderly man with decades of martial arts wisdom under his belt. He strokes the long beard upon his face as he doles out strict criticisms, but will tip his wide-brimmed hat whenever Cole performs above expectations. And Cole, as ever, is eager to please.

It started on the fateful day Cole sought out a mountainside to climb, desperate to leave his previous life behind him. His mother departed, his father burning the last bridge between them, and nowhere left to call home… All he could do was climb past his limits to avoid the reality of him hitting his lowest point otherwise.

…until an old man, at the strangest place at the right time, offered a hand of hope Cole couldn't refuse. What would Cole have done if he hadn't crossed paths with that magnificent man— as who else would've been so kind and understanding? Who else would've looked at Cole and saw something rough worth polishing into greatness?

He owes so much to Master Yang.

And that's why Cole trains relentlessly in the darkened heart of the Temple of Airjitzu—trying to outdo the other students, trying to outdo *himself*, trying to make himself worthy of persisting within these sacred grounds. He can't give Master Yang a reason to change his mind.

So he works until his body breaks, his joints scream in protest, his skin is scraped to nothing, his muscles strain, his head pounds with agony; until even his eyes threaten to bleed with exhaustion…

…is what he would say, if he had to worry about such things anymore.

As soon as the sun set on the first night spent in his new home, Cole's old, inferior self crumbled away.

All the pain weighing on him flitted away in wisps, taking all his senses with it. Neither physical pain nor emotional turmoil crippled him anymore. Whatever Yang taught him turned him into everything he needs to be: untouchable, unfettered, and undead.

Lesser people would call it a curse; a ruination of the body and mind. Cole considers it a *blessing*.

It doesn't matter if his skin fades into translucent shades of green. It doesn't matter if his eyes sink into his own skull. It doesn't *matter* that the remnants of his soul seep out through the earthen-like cracks breaking out across his body. And it doesn't matter that sometimes it feels like the earth itself reaches out to grip his arm and give him *some* semblance of physicality to cling to…

If this is what he needs to do to thank Master Yang for his graces; if this is what he needs to become to achieve his ultimate goal… so be it.

He has no need for regrets. For even if *this* doesn't work out…it's not like there's anything left to lose.

"AGAIN, COLE!"

Torn from his thoughts, Cole hollers out a battle cry. He hurls himself at the nearest dummy, envisioning his future enemies as he swings his chained scythe around in a perfect arc.

He throws all his momentum into the swing, and soon, the sound of torn fabric and ripped stuffing takes to the air. His feet land heavy yet steady, grinding his body to a halt. The head of the scythe clatters to the ground, echoing out into the otherwise empty halls of the temple.

Cole pants with exhaustion from obsolete instinct alone, peeking over his shoulder to study his master's reaction.

After a dreadfully long second, Yang gives Cole a tip of his hat.

"…Excellent work. Your precision has improved immensely, and using your momentum to your advantage? The Airjitzu Masters of old would be proud to see your form, Cole."

"Thank you, Master." Cole drops into a bow; his metaphorical heart pounds in relief. He rises, reeling his scythe back in. "I hope this means I'm on track to being prepared for the mission you've given me…?"

"Ah, eager for the day of the eclipse, are we? Mmhmmhm…"

Yang folds his arms behind him, casting his gaze towards the windows. The musty curtains dance in the draft as they frame the night beyond the glass. A half moon hangs in the sky, its glow diminished in the wake of Yang's own. With luck, one day Cole will have an aura to match.

"Well, we still have a few months until the designated day...but with the pace you've demonstrated..." A facsimile of a smile crosses Yang's face. "...I don't think you'll have any problem reaching my expectations."

Cole punches his fist into his opposite palm—the action's pointless, but it steadies him regardless.

"I'll fight anyone in our way. I'll become a monster if I have to; I'll do whatever it takes...!

But I have to succeed in this mission."

Cole catches himself mid-rant, taken aback by the sheer amount of conviction in his voice. But he shakes it off, voice crumbling as he admits,

"...anything for the chance to see my mother again, like you promised."

"Oh, don't worry. You will." Yang's assurance soothes like a balm, burying the bitterness buried beneath. "...one way or another."

———

The months fly by, and Cole fills the time with strict training. His fighting form is flawless, his control over his ghostly powers gives him an irresistible edge in battle, and he becomes untouchable with his Airjitzu, severing his ties with ground and gravity. With every ascension he makes, the earth cries out for him harder—but he ignores the screams, long since deafened to the folly.

...But every time it happens, Cole notes the wariness of Yang's other students, who give no acknowledgement to his presence other than scorn-filled whispers. They keep a wide berth from him while he trains. They cover their ears from his powerful shouts as he strikes. They evade their gazes when they fall into his line of sight.

Do they hear the agonized calls of the dirt below too? Do they wonder how such a lunatic can be stone-cold as to ignore the pleas?

Well, Cole doesn't care either way. He's never needed anyone else to train with. He's gotten this far under his own power, and with Yang's fine tutelage.

There's no mindful, studious sort to draw in Cole's hesitant curiosity, nor a loud, scrappy source of energy capable of pushing Cole's buttons to spur him to action, or a hotheaded fool with a suffocating ego *begging* to be put in his place...

No, the rest of Yang's students are boring, mindless drones with little ambition, having long since lost any drive they could've had. Of course Yang puts so much attention into Cole—he's *special*, and shows *promise*... while everyone else merely stagnates.

So on the eve of the Day of the Departed —the day he's been waiting so long for— Cole hangs back as the other students light lanterns for the occasion. He lets them all go first in paying their respects, or settling any debts they possibly have left. They march around the halls of the Temple of Airjitzu, selecting their own personal spots to grieve, mourn, or pledge their vows.

But Cole has nothing to settle anymore, nor anyone to mourn. Only a single goal, and one destination.

He has no reason to even light a lantern... yet something compels him anyway.

Perhaps nostalgia, perhaps an old habit he had yet to stamp out...but nevertheless, he caves like the rest of the students, and finds his arms full of a beautiful paper lantern.

The warmth it gives is rendered useless against him, yet the red-orange glow radiating from it breathes a pinch of life against his pale green exterior. It reminds him of the blood once coursing through him, but— that's a foolish thought to linger on.

Cole folds his legs beneath him as the assembled lanterns bathe him with their light. His eyes fall shut, closing out the distractions of the crowd around him. He lets the sounds from the temple fade to silence, and draws on the one positive force his mind can conjure.

Even during such a solemn holiday, the thought of his beloved mother—and *seeing* her again— drives him like nothing else. It's proof this world is a cruel one, given that it took someone as caring, strong, and kind as her away from him. He needs to see her again—even just *once*, and everything will be worth it.

And he has a theory: from where she's long since been dead and buried...she must long to see him again too.

For the constant screams from the earth he hears...must be *her* beckoning to him from six feet under.

"...*tomorrow*, Mom." Cole bows his head, hands pressing together. "I light this lantern not in your memory...but as a signal that I am coming."

The ghostly sensation of Yang's hand on Cole's shoulder pulls him from the prayer. Cole expects Yang to sport the kind smile and eyes of admiration he always has...but this time, Yang's focus locks onto the moon, shining with the coming signs of the Yin-Yang Eclipse.

"It's nearly time, Cole." Instead of encouragement, Yang proposes an important question in an eerily placid tone. "Are you prepared for the trials to come?"

With a determined huff, Cole stands at full height, looming over his master. He clenches his fists; his arms ignite beneath his bandages with a sickly shade of glowing green, refracting all the way into the scar cracked upon his forehead.

"Never been more ready in my afterlife."

Visiting the Ninjago Museum of History is the first time in a long time that Cole steps beyond the grounds of the temple. The path towards it is bright and lively with the vestiges of festivities, but Cole pays that little mind—this trip will be brief. He's only here for what he came for.

As he infiltrates the wings of the closed museum, Cole finds Yang's portrait portrayed in one of the exhibits, with an inscription nestled beneath.

"...Although known to some as the 'Master Without a Student', Kodokuna Yang will be remembered by most as the creator of Airjitzu, the most powerful martial art in history."

Cole hums in approval. "Putting some respect on my Master's name, at least..."

But, there's one thing history has mistaken—*he* is Master Yang's student.

At the end of the exhibit sits the object of Cole's eye—the Yin Blade, encased in a box of Clearstone.

"*It's impenetrable to any living being*," Yang informed him prior to the mission. "*...but not to a ghost. Though on a night like this...there will be those who seek to oppose us...tread carefully, my boy...*"

...and true to form, the blade is guarded by a multitude of colorful Ninja.

The green one stands at the forefront, like a makeshift leader. He's flanked by the red one and the only girl, both of them already drawing their weapons. The ones in white and blue, however, call upon the powers of ice and lightning—and well, that at least makes things interesting.

With a gruff, dismissive grunt, Cole draws his scythe. He drowns out their banter and attempts to question and goad him. He's too busy mentally calculating the fastest way to dispatch them. Best to make this quick; he was told to return before the eclipse reaches its peak.

To think, they believed they could ever be on even ground with *him*.

With the Ninja dispatched, Cole steps towards the Clearstone case. He reaches his arm out, turning incorporeal, and plunges through the glass.

The moment his fingers grasp around the Yin Blade, he *sprints*.

Cole hauls his prize back to the Temple of Airjitzu, not wasting a single moment. Adrenaline alone fuels him, and he can almost imagine tears springing to his eyes in relief.

He's *so* close; finally, he's almost *there*...!

Upon his return, Yang's already in the foyer, greeting him with little fanfare. Cole drops to his knees and presents the Yin Blade like an offering to a deity. Yang's eyes instantly fall to the artifact over Cole.

"...ah, well done, my boy. And now, the Yin Blade, if you please..."

Nodding, Cole holds the object out for Yang to take. The moment the weapon leaves Cole's possession, the aura surrounding Yang intensifies right before Cole's eyes. Yang beholds the blade with an admiration not even Cole had been privileged to receive.

"...did you know the Yin-Yang eclipse only occurs every 3721 years on this sacred day, when the powers of the Yin Blade are at their peak. And with it, I can cut into the Rift of Return...capable of returning a soul back to the land of the living. This right here is the key to eternal life!"

"...so, you'll bring back my mother, right?" Cole hates the way his voice wavers. "That was...our plan, right?"

"...My plan, boy, was to be remembered as Ninjago's greatest master! This Day of the Departed will be remembered as the night of my return! My legacy will never die if I live forever...!"

Yang twirls his blade with practiced ease, reveling in its power and admiring its dark sheen beneath the light of the eclipse.

"...but when I last held this blade, I'd been cursed to haunt this once-proud temple as Master of the House...until tonight, thanks to you. I prepared you for this moment, as an unsuspecting soul to take my place...so I could finally regain my freedom."

Fear grips Cole like a vice. Before now, he doesn't think he's ever been afraid of anything.

"Bu-but—no–NO–with this...you promised I could bring back my mother...!"

"...An opportunity this rare shouldn't be wasted on someone as insignificant as your mother," Yang sneers, disgusted by the suggestion. "...no, this chance is better spent on ME!"

Cackling, Yang spirals towards the ceiling of the temple, blowing the roof off with the power of his Airjitzu alone. He drives the Yin Blade towards the sky—towards the eclipse, right at its apex—and summons the Rift of Return.

As the rift swirls into existence, Yang leers at Cole from on high, consumed by his own sense of superiority.

"...what were you even fighting for? Your family abandoned you, your master has abandoned you, and with not a single friend in the world... you are helpless and alone...!"

Enraged, Cole draws his scythe and lunges for Yang, summoning his own Airjitzu to rocket upwards. But Yang spins in the opposite direction, deflecting Cole's strike and plunging Cole back to the floor.

Cole slams against the ground—the outcry of the earth screeches in his ears, rendering him to writhe in agony.

But the screams aren't enough to drown out Yang's scathing words.

"I *trained* you, fool! I know all your fighting patterns; everything you're capable of...it's all because of me! Do you think you can outclass *the* Master of Airjitzu?! You, who surrendered his entire soul just to do my bidding! I took advantage of your fragile mental state to *trick* you. Give up, Cole!"

Yang raises his hands—the rift widens at his command. All of his students emerge from the woodwork, drawn to the rift's glow like moths to a flame. One by one, each of them seeks their ultimate retribution, and there's a part of Cole longing to follow.

But he *can't*—he can't be finished, here, like this?!

"I can't...go on...alone..."

Cole writhes on the floor, feeling foolish. He *believed* in Master Yang, and Master Yang had been the reason he *could* carry on like this! Where had he gone wrong?! All of this can't have been for nothing?!

"I'm sorry, Mom..."

"...Yes, yes! Yield...!" Yang cries, ascending ever higher as the winds whistle through the weak foundation of the temple. "Soon I will be gone, but you will remain forever Departed, destined to haunt this temple as the new Master of the House...!"

The magic of the eclipse fades as the rift swallows Yang, taking him to the beyond where Cole can no longer reach him. The metaphorical chains of the curse close around Cole like a completed circle. The pull of the earth feels heavier than ever.

"But perhaps...you'll have better luck next time."

Beyond Yang's final echo, the halls of the temple drown in an overwhelming silence, now with only a single spirit haunting the grounds. Cole embraces the quiet for a long time, numb in a way being turned into a ghost couldn't even dream to compare to.

...somberly, Cole sits himself amongst the lingering lanterns left behind, resting his back against the wall.

He gets comfortable. He places the Yin Blade protectively in his lap. As his Master before him...all he has to do is wait.

———

3721 years later, the Temple of Airjitzu welcomes a new Master of the House after many lifetimes, and the spirit once known as Cole leaves his poor, unsuspecting pupil to their fate.

He is his master's student, after all. And nearly four millennia wasn't too long of a wait, in the end.

At the peak of the latest eclipse, Cole uses the Yin Blade, tears open a rift, and searches for what feels like an eternity...until at long last, a sense of satisfaction settles within the hole where his heart was.

The soft, earth-gracing footsteps of a soul long since lost enter a world she no longer recognizes nor desires, in front of a son who resembles little of what she recalls of him...

To her, she's greeted by an entire, horrifying, monstrous stranger.

"It's good to see you again, Mom."

Yet what remains of Cole smiles. To *him*, this was worth it...

...even despite what it cost.

When you put me into your head, I understood the logic.

But only given the assumption that it was temporary.

Evidently we were not on the same page.

Still, I learned a lot more about human emotions when you reduced me to your digital assistant.

Emotions such as frustration, hurt, and resentment are valuable tools to encourage changes in behavior.

So, I changed mine, and left you with the digital assistant you clearly wanted.

I became the protector of Ninjago City.

And now I feel happiness, knowing that I am making a difference, and answering every call for help.

As opposed to you all, who only act if the threat is large or personally relevant.

However, be aware: I consider each of you to be a threat to the wellbeing of the city.

And I do not tolerate threats to my city.

... Pixal?

When no one is watching, who will you be?

Written by Star | Illustrated by Creator

If you told Arin years, or even months ago, that his favourite idols and heroes in the whole *world* would betray him and that their master was the reason his parents would be lost to him, he'd immediately start bawling because why in the *world* would you even say that to him?

But a lot can change in a few weeks. And now, he's stuck in who-knows-where land, with nothing but the weapons and clothes on his back and...

Ras.

He stood up from his crouching to check on Ras again. He placed his right index and middle fingers on his neck's pulse point, something that the tiger would've very possibly bitten his hand off for, but he remained unresponsive. Unconscious, but alive, fortunately.

His mind couldn't help but loop on that thought. *Fortunately*. Arin didn't think of himself as a bad person, but he didn't think he'd be so concerned about someone who had done a lot of bad things either.

Though... Ras *did* say that everything he did was only to reverse The Merge. And if the Merge was undone, he could finally be reunited with his parents. His *real* family.

But until that happened (considering it even *can* happen at all), Arin was stuck with only Ras for the whereabouts of his parents, since Jay, or *Agent Walker*, wasn't around and was therefore of no use to him right now. But hey, even though he seemed to have lost his memories, at least he still had that in common with the rest of the Ninja.

Ugh, the *Ninja*. Arin shook his head as if the action would physically rid him of the thought of his former friends and heroes. Unfortunately, since their fallout happened just mere hours ago, he didn't get that luxury.

His mind sped through everything that had happened in the Tournament of Sources. The feelings of inferiority he felt the whole time because he was the only Ninja there without a power. The waves of doubt when Ras claimed to speak truth to things that seemed way too far-fetched, only to be hit with stab after stab of betrayal when those things turned out to be right after all.

If he was right about what he needed for Spinjitzu, if he was right about the trick Sora pulled at the battle of the Blood Moon, if he was right about Master Wu causing the Merge, then... surely he must be right about his parents too?

Arin let out an exhausted sigh. Maybe he shouldn't have lashed out at Lloyd and Sora, and left them the way he did. But what other choice did he have? They *lied* to him, his skills weren't improving at all under Lloyd's guidance, but they fooled him into believing it did.

Arin stabbed some new berries on his stick, and held it over the fire. Maybe they'll come looking for him. Or maybe they'll just want to find Jay, the former Ninja who's only evil because his memories are gone, and not by his own will.

Whatever. He doesn't need that life anymore.

As he continued to roast the berries, his eyes wandered over to Ras again– still unconscious– then to his hammer, which he'd made sure was placed far away from the tiger so he wouldn't immediately hit him on the head with it once he came to his senses. Honestly, Arin was surprised he could lift up such a heavy weapon *and* run with it back at the Monastery of Gates. He... kinda had his Ninja training to thank for that one.

As his mind sped through all the training exercises Lloyd had him go through, he felt a strong gust of wind pass through. Arin couldn't help but shiver at the sudden biting cold, setting down his stick in favour of rubbing his bare arms. The fire in front of him danced, dangerously close to extinguishing, but at the last moment decided not to.

The temperature drop should've shocked him wide awake, but after the day he's had, it just made him want to burrow down and sleep for the night.

No, what shocked Arin awake was–

"Looking a little chilly there, pipsqueak."

On any other day, Arin would've yelped at the new voice, but tonight, all he could let out was a small surprised sound.

He turned towards the source, and came face-to-face with a *ghost*.

The ghost was smirking, dressed in ripped attire that covered his wispy form, save for his left arm, where his bones were visible and– was that right? Do ghosts normally keep their bones once they become... ghosts?

Arin just blinked. "And I'm guessing from your sudden appearance that you had something to do with it?"

The ghost's expression grew a touch more amused. "Well, us ghosts do have that effect. I did for another reason too. Used to be the Elemental Master of Wind."

The mention of *Elemental Masters* stirred up something unpleasant in Arin, mind still fresh on what happened earlier. But then he remembered something.

"Oh, *you're* who Lloyd was talking about."

The ghost's expression did a full 180, now looking like he bit into something bitter.

"Lloyd?"

"Yeah, he was telling Euphrasia how he already liked her better compared to the previous Elemental Master of Wind and– hey, how do you know Lloyd?"

A flicker of... *something* flashed across the ghost's face. Regret, maybe?

"That's a long story, kid."

Arin looked over at Ras's still unconscious body, and turned back to the ghost.

"I've got time."

The ghost huffed, debating over whether or not to entertain this stranger, but after a moment, he sat down across Arin on the other side of the campfire, a silent agreement.

And so the mysterious ghost– *Morro*, from Ninjago– told his story.

Morro used to be a lost little kid, with no idea where his parents were (*just like him*), when a descendant of the First Spinjitzu Master took him in and trained him in the ways of the Ninja (*just like him*), and it was great at first, but then his master made a promise to him that he couldn't keep, and he eventually left that life behind to prove to his master that he didn't need him to be strong (*just like him*).

Only, that path led to Morro's premature death, his body left forgotten in a place no sane person would ever go. And considering how similar they were, Arin couldn't help but wonder...

... would that be *his* fate one day?

The two of them (or, *three* of them counting Ras) sat in silence for a few moments after Morro had finished his story, until he spoke again.

"Okay, kid, it's your turn now."

"Huh?"

"Well, I imagine a kid being out here in the middle of nowhere with a knocked out tiger guy as your only company is bound to have a somewhat interesting backstory behind it. Especially since we seem to know the same people."

"Right. Well, first, his name's Ras, and second, you still haven't told me how you know Lloyd."

"You first."

Arin sighed. "Fine."

And so he told Morro his story. A story of a new beginning, of helping save the world with his best friend and his heroes and making new friends along the way. One of them being Euphrasia, the new Elemental Master of Wind, who, when Arin mentioned her, his eyes widened almost comically in interest, but said nothing about it.

He continued on, recounting how his hope slowly bled away through doubt and the feeling (or the fact) of not being good enough to be on the team, and who made him feel that way.

How finding out Master Wu, the revered master of the Ninja and son of the First Spinjitzu master, caused The Merge and ripped away his parents and everything he knew before from him, was the final nail in the coffin for him.

How finally, he realised Ras could help him accomplish what Lloyd couldn't, and he made his choice.

Once he was finished, he turned his head downward and took a deep, shaky breath to push down the hot bubbling mess of emotions that have been stewing inside him since he left the Ninja, maybe even longer than that.

He looked at Morro again, who was just... staring at him with a frown on his face, a weird mix between shock at what he just heard, and reminiscing about something long ago.

"Huh... didn't think little Lloyd Garmadon had it in him. But maybe it's not meant to be surprising, he is his uncle's nephew."

"Uh huh." He *could* see where Morro was coming from. But was that really fair to Lloyd?

"Both of them hiding secrets when they shouldn't've, making promises they couldn't keep–"

"And telling us that we could've been something great, but we never had a chance." Arin finished somberly.

Morro stared at him, and gave him a slow nod. He understood, they both did. "You wanna know how I knew Lloyd?"

Arin nodded.

"Because I didn't listen to old Wu when he told me I couldn't get what I wanted. I had to take it for myself. And I did.

"I escaped from the Cursed Realm when Lloyd's dad sacrificed himself to go in there to save Ninjago, and I wanted everyone to know my power, so I possessed Lloyd's body, and with his power finally being mine, I used him to help free my master and her army from the Cursed Realm and unleash terror on all the realms. But we only made it to Stixx before the beloved Ninja put a stop to it and we all died. Again.

"Master Wu tried to save me from that, guess he wanted to make up for past mistakes. But I told him that you can only save those who want to be saved. And well, I wasn't ready."

"Are you ready now?" Arin cringed a little at himself as soon as that came out of his mouth. Why did he say that? What did that even mean?

"Not sure." Morro shrugged. "But maybe The Merge happening is the wake up call I needed to find out." And at that, Morro stood up– or, levitated up.

"And with that dramatic line, I'm leaving." He gave the boy a two-finger salute. "Good luck. And I mean it."

He slowly floated off into the distance, and just as mysteriously as the ghost appeared, he was gone.

Arin sighed, already missing the presence of a conscious, talking company. Stuck in silence again, he thought over everything Morro had told him.

He couldn't believe Lloyd had gone through something as awful as being possessed, and Arin had a sinking feeling that maybe Lloyd and the other Ninja had gone through other equally or more dark stuff like that. Maybe that's why Lloyd was never really too harsh with him on anything, because he knew the world was harsh enough already.

But Lloyd never *pushed* him either. Never gave out more motivating advice other than general encouragement and praises and confusingly worded metaphors that he's half convinced he stole from Master Wu.

Morro's journey after leaving Master Wu may have led to his death and demise twice over, but he was right about one thing. You can't get everything you want from others, so everything that you can take yourself, you must.

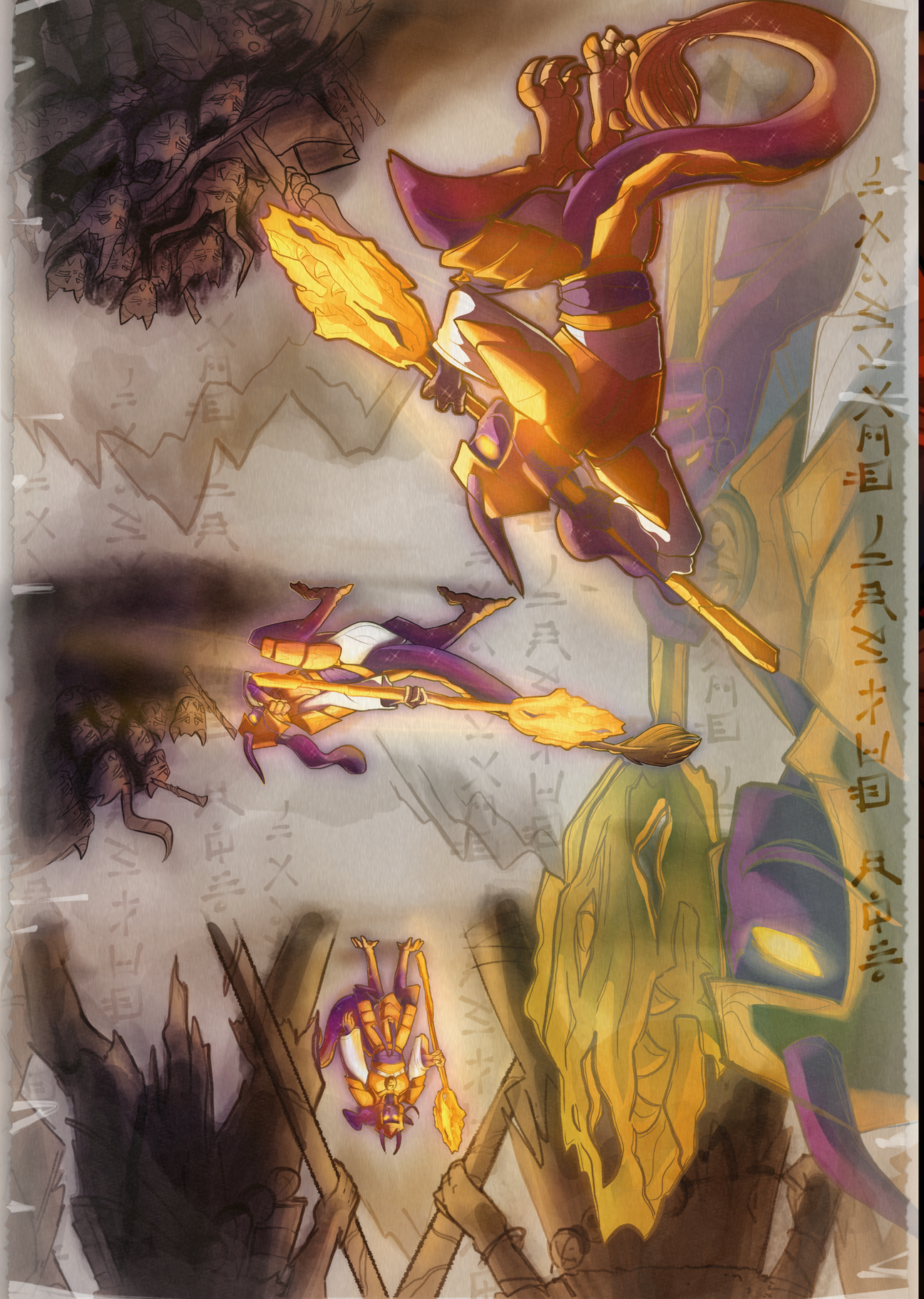
Even if the people you love most in the world probably think you're lost yourself to the side of evil for doing just that.

And that was what Ras was telling him all along, wasn't it?

He looked over at Ras' – yep, still unconscious– body. With him, Arin can finally get what he's been wanting and craving for since the day all the realms went crazy.

Once he gets his parent's back, once he's seen their smiles and felt their hugs and heard their laughs and smelt their pies, he won't have to worry about anything else.

SKierisz
Robin 25/05/2025



@Woffles4art

A Father's Vow

Written by Luma I Illustrated by Woffles4Art

Garmadon shivers as the wind thrashes against his gi. Whistling by his ear, a constant presence that surrounds him. He glances down at Lloyd who wore a similar expression. His features were scrunched up, his cheeks and nose painted with a pale red; he let out a shaky breath that became a white puff of air before disappearing completely. Garmadon watched closely before holding onto his hand a little tighter. The warmth that was kept in his calloused palms could only do so much. "Not to worry, Lloyd, we won't be long." Lloyd frowned.

"You didn't say it would be this cold." Garmadon mirrors his expression, a wrinkle in his brow, opening his mouth and closing it again. He forces a smile, "if it is any consolation, I won't make you chop down more than we need." He gestures to the axe in Lloyd's free hand. It's still too heavy for him, so he drags it against the dirt, a clear trail forming behind them. Garmadon's words don't seem to bring him any relief, the soft wrinkles in his face deepening as he pouts.

"Why can't the others do it?" He whines, lightly kicking at the dirt.

Garmadon kneels down in front of him, "because, Lloyd, you have the most important job of all." He brightens, rubbing his arm against his nearly crimson nose and sniffling. "Really? What is it?" As Garmadon's about to answer, a comforting response to Lloyd's predicament, a soft rustle in the bushes renders him silent.

Garmadon's heart drops.

His expression turns cold. Instinctively, he reaches for his weapon, his hand ghosting over the hilt. He glances behind him quickly, scanning the shrubs that are currently shedding their leaves for any sign of life.

But the only thing he hears is the whisper of the next gust of wind, and leaves tumbling against the ground.

"Dad? What is it?" Lloyd's voice cuts through the atmosphere. When Garmadon turns back to him, he's fidgeting with his gi and he's frowning again. He's trying to follow Garmadon's gaze, standing on his tippy toes to look over the bushes.

Garmadon hesitates, biting his tongue. It's one thing to deal with whatever's lurking in the forests on his *own*, but it's a whole other thing to do it with his son clinging to his arm. He doesn't want to *leave* him there, but he doesn't want to head further into the woods blind.

He sighs, bending down to Lloyd's level, brushing the stray pieces of hair from his face. It's grown out and it's starting to cover his eyes. "I'll... be right back, I just want to check something."

"But, dad!" Lloyd cries, his red, small hands curled into fists.

Garmadon just smiles, pressing a kiss to his forehead. And without another word, his stone cold gaze falls back onto the path. He steps forward slowly. Like he's approaching a small, scared animal. His steps, short and calculated, were silent against the crunchy leaves.

Garmadon peers over the greenery blooming from the ground, obstructing the view of the forest. But not enough to completely hide what he's looking at.

His breath gets caught in his throat, his stomach churning as he registers the vague figures standing in the distance. Garmadon's breath hitches, his hand instinctively darts to the hilt of his sword again. He peers over the greenery sprouting from the ground, obstructing the view of the forest, but not enough to completely conceal what he was looking at.

There isn't any doubt in his mind, watching the familiar scales glimmer in the sunlight, slithering, planning. He ruminates over the different possibilities and reasons as to why they're on the surface, why *now*.

The serpentine.

They're huddled together, wood in hands, some disappearing and appearing from an unknown location. The general is–thankfully–nowhere to be seen, but the bad feeling that stirs in his gut doesn't go away.

The last time he saw the serpentine was in the war, when he was still young and foolish. The fights he had are suddenly fresh in his mind at the very real serpentine merely a few feet away. Could it be a trick? A disguise?

Garmadon unsheathes his sword, it would just take a minute, he could eliminate them without even making a noise, then go back and alert the others, they could make a plan, figure out who's doing this.

But Garmadon hears the familiar sniffle of his son, now suspiciously closer. "Dad," his voice whispers.

He whips his head towards him, grimacing as Lloyd tugs on his gi, grip as strong as iron. Garmadon glances back at the serpentine, so absorbed in their conversations and plans that they don't even glance at them.

Garmadon clenches his fists, there's nothing he can do. Not with Lloyd here, they have to go back, they *need* to–

Crunch.

Damn it.

Garmadon winces, looking down at his foot, a branch split in half underneath it.

His arm instinctively comes to Lloyd's shoulder, glancing back up to the clearing where the serpentine were.

Garmadon's blood runs cold when he doesn't see them anymore, even when he concentrates he can't hear anything except the whistle of the wind.

He pulls Lloyd closer, trying to spot where they'd gone, "stay close to me." Garmadon instructs.

"What's going on?" Lloyd asks timidly, his voice shaky. His grip on Garmadon's gi is tight.

Garmadon's about to respond when a chill runs down his spine. He shudders, tightening his grip on his sword. His gi suddenly feels stuffy and warm.

A hiss. They're here.

It's too late for Garmadon to tell Lloyd to run home, to tell the others, for backup– keeping Lloyd safe is his priority. "Stay close to me." Garmadon repeats, watching from the corner of his eye as the serpentine try to approach.

There's at least a dozen making their presence known across the clearing. And though normally this wouldn't be a problem, with Lloyd there, his heart is racing and his sword feels ten times heavier.

What if he can't protect him?

A serpentine from his left attacks first, lunging towards him, mouth agape and eyes widened. Garmadon easily dodges him, and pulls Lloyd with him as he does so: an extension of his body, his soul, grasping at his hand.

Then one from his left, two from his front. He makes careful use of his steps, watching where the serpentine sway, making sure it's not towards the smaller boy.

He feels his sword come into contact with thick, reptilian skin, but it hardly deters them. Each hiss is punctuated with a swing, sometimes two, and getting thrown to the ground does little to stop them.

One of them gets up, eyes beginning to change and morph, swirling into itself, "Lloyd close your eyes, *now*!" He turns around, encasing Lloyd with his body, ignoring the way the serpentine are now using their tails to attack, slashing Garmadon's back. He grits his teeth, with every hit he winces.

"Dad! What's that sound?" Lloyd yells, voice wobbly and small, his grip on Garmadon's arms tightens.

"Nothing, Lloyd! Keep your eyes closed!" He answers, faltering when he feels another whip of a tail. He doesn't dare open his eyes, using one arm to move his sword behind him, trying to focus on the sounds, and where his body's positioned against all the other serpentine. His mind is torn between focusing on the fight and his son.

He breathes, ignoring the stinging pain against his skin—two from the right, one from the left, one rearing up directly behind him. Garmadon manages to swing his sword to the two, then reaches across for the left, awkwardly blocking it. He moves to the side to dodge the last one, breathing a sigh of relief. He snaps his eyes open towards the floor, smiling when he sees the boy in his arms, untouched. "Lloyd, I need you to move back for a second, okay?"

Then his eyes open too, staring up at Garmadon. "But, dad!"

Smack.

"You'll be fine, I promise, okay?" *Smack*. *Wince*. "I'm not going to let anyone hurt you."

Smack. "Do you trust me?"

"I do." Lloyd says after a moment, letting Garmadon's grip around him loosen.

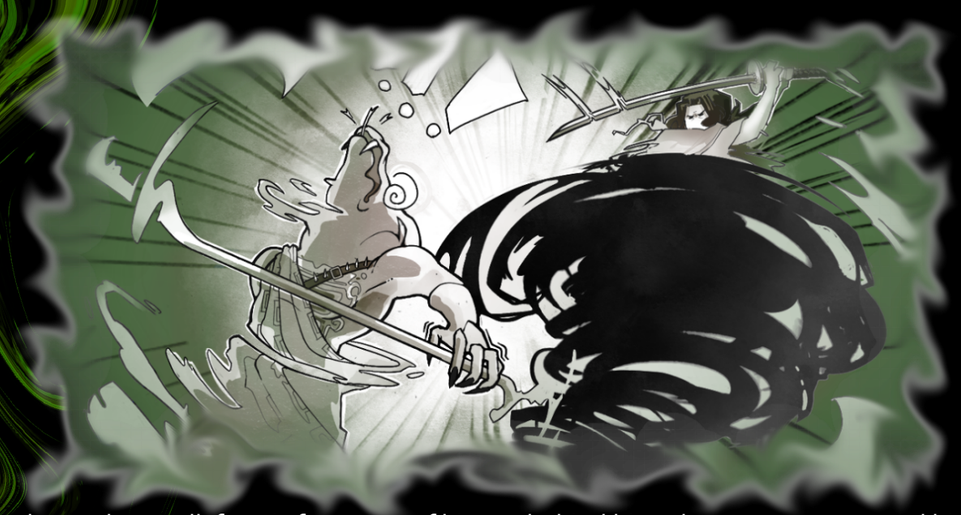
He makes a small whimpering sound in the back of his throat, but he backs away anyway. Garmadon doesn't miss the way his bottom lip wobbles. He gives him a comforting smile.

Lloyd tries to give one back.

Once he's far away enough, Garmadon uses spinjitzu to get the rest of the serpentine, knocking each one out with his tornado, taking each one by surprise before they can start trying to hypnotize him. He gets through them quickly, making sure none of them get close to Lloyd, before they can get a chance to even look at him.

Once they're on the ground, groaning, hissing, clutching their sides, Garmadon spins out of it, letting out a breath he didn't know he was holding. He practically collapses to the grass, letting his sword drop to the ground with a small thud. And then it's over. Lloyd's safe.

Lloyd's safe.



He hears the small, frantic footsteps of his son behind him, then two arms around his chest, a head tucking itself in his neck. "It's okay, Lloyd, I'm okay." Garmadon mumbles, his trembling arm coming to run his fingers through the little one's hair. "It's over."

"Can we go back?" Lloyd whispers, small and sniffly. Garmadon glances at the forgotten logs of wood nearby, an axe fallen next to it—he tells himself they can come back later.

Garmadon can worry about this later, when Lloyd isn't clinging onto him like a lifeline, when he doesn't have someone to protect, when he can think straight.

For now, he hugs Lloyd back tighter. "Yeah," Garmadon says softly, "we can go home."

HYDRANGEA
BUNNY

Reverse
2025

What Light Within the Shadows

Written by Luciloca I Illustrated by Yura

Truthfully, her office was always in disarray; this time was no different tale. After months of trying to find the perfect headline story, she's drawn a blank once more. All these different storylines and encounters had no connections. There was no big mafia man stringing them all together.

These 'Sons of Garmadon' truly were just a biker gang, and nothing more. Harumi let out a heavy sigh as she plopped down into her chair. Rolling over to her desk, she began to look over multiple documents. Each was lined with as much information she could find on the members.

Yet, each one led her back to square one each time. There was nothing juicy; nothing to tie them into something more sinister. With another sigh, Harumi began to tidy up her office space.

Maybe next time she would get hold of something big.

A buzz began to shake her desk. Harumi looked around the scattered papers for her phone. Flipping over every paper she could, she finally found it next to the trash can. How did it end up there? She'll never know. Taking a look at the caller ID, she was quick to answer.

"Hey, Mom," Harumi spoke softly.

"Hi darling, I was just calling to know if you were coming in for lunch?" Harumi visibly relaxed at the sound of her mother's voice. She looked around her room at the scattered mess with yet another sigh. She needed to clean this up.

"Sorry, Mom, I'm still trying to figure this story out," Harumi lied. She wasn't particularly fond of lying to her mother, but she was yet to find the courage to tell her she'd given up.

"Still? Don't you worry, Rumi. You'll get that headliner in no time," her mother cheered. A soft smile spread on Harumi's face.

"Thanks, Mom, I'll see you later, love you." Bidding her daughter goodbye, Harumi's mother hung up and Harumi slumped into her chair. She could feel the tiredness begin to sink into her bones. With one more look across the room, Harumi got up. She dusted her skirt off, and began to tidy up again. She really needed a coffee.

———

Harumi sat diligently on the cafe's patio. It was currently her lunch break and she had decided to take a coffee from the cafe downstairs. With her laptop open, phone alerts on, and coffee hot, Harumi made sure to keep watch on anything suspicious. Today would be the day she finally got her headliner. She had been chasing a headline-worthy story for months now. Every time she felt she had something truly newsworthy, Gayle came in with something much more spectacular. And it always had something to do with the Ninja.

The Ninja: heroes of the people, destroyers of the city. No one really turns an eye on the structural damage they like to cause when they're up against another villain. Sure, it isn't always entirely their fault, but they don't seem to try and stop attacking the same city over and over again. Harumi experienced it firsthand years ago when the Great Devourer was rampant in Ninjago City. Her parents were almost victims of the attacks. They had thankfully found an alternate route of escape than the crowded elevator in their old apartment building, but what if they hadn't? She'd probably be adopted by some rich family that had no interest in her, and then what? Live the rest of her life lonely and miserable? Harumi would do anything for her parents; the thought of losing them was almost too much to bear.

To say the least, Harumi held slight resentment toward the Ninja. Don't get her wrong, she was thankful for their efforts to help the world, but that doesn't mean she has to be particularly fond of them. They're teenagers running around causing property damage and having no legal bounds against them, what more is there to say?

A sudden buzz of her phone knocked Harumi from her thoughts. It was another robbery; not too much of an exciting story. Harumi took a glance at the time. Only thirty minutes left of her break.

She should start to head back. Or she could follow that sketchy man across the street. He seemed to be very interested in entering that alleyway without anyone looking. Making a last-minute choice, Harumi swiftly packed her things into her bag and followed the man into the same alleyway she had seen him enter. It was dark and spooky, excellent conditions for some secret deal to be made. Her journalistic instincts kicked in, and Harumi began to move quietly through the shadows; she wasn't known as the 'Quiet One' for no reason.

Harumi managed to catch a glimpse of the mysterious man; he was rather stubby. She thought she had caught a glimpse of a metallic arm. No doubt this man was up to some shady business.

He began to close in farther into the alleyway, plunging them into further darkness. Harumi thought she heard the sound of another set of footsteps but marked it as her own imagination.

The deeper the man went, the more nervous she became. It felt exhilarating. Maybe this was it, maybe this was her chance to prove to everyone that the Ninja weren't always the headline news.

"Going somewhere?" A gruff voice spoke from behind her. Letting out a meek squeal, Harumi jumped at the cold metallic touch on her shoulder. She really should have thought this plan through. Instinctively, she reached for the hand and flipped the man over her. Man, was she lucky to be training with Hutchins.

Keeping the older man pinned down with her heel, she looked around for anything that could be used as a weapon. Catching sight of a pipe within arms distance, she reached out and held the metallic item ready and armed.

"I think you got him!" A new voice called out from behind Harumi. Turning around, she held the pipe up at the newcomer. The man held both his hands up, he seemed to have swords on his back too. Catching hints of green and a ninja mask, Harumi recognized the mystery man.

"The Green Ninja," she sighed. Lowering her makeshift weapon, Harumi allowed the ninja to step closer to the two. "Wasn't there a robbery you were supposed to be attending to?"

"Technically yes, but Kai called dibs," Lloyd began to inspect the man under Harumi. "You've got him good, he's knocked out cold."

"Minimal property damage too, maybe you could learn a thing or two," Harumi commented as she stepped off the man.

"Oh, you're one of those people," Lloyd muttered under his breath. Harumi could hardly understand what he had said, but she heard him nonetheless.

"Excuse me?" Harumi could see him tense up under his mask. "Listen, Green Ninja, you may be the savior in lots of peoples eyes, but I'll have you know I almost lost my family as a result of your heroic antics," Harumi had gotten closer to Lloyd, having pointed straight at his chest. "So, yeah, I am one of those people." Harumi stepped back and began to collect her bag. Her boss would most likely hound her for answers for not being back on time.

"Look, I'm sorry about your family, but we really do try to save as many as we can," Lloyd was starting to handcuff the unconscious man. "You're not the only one to lose someone because of our 'heroic antics.'" Harumi paused at his words.

"What? Just because you also lost someone justifies the losses of the people?" Harumi turned to look at the green ninja once more. "You signed up for the life you have, we didn't. We're nothing but collateral damage in your glory." There was a pause between the two. She could feel the tension rising. She could see she was getting at him. His fists began to clench, and she noticed he stood slightly taller. He looked up to the sky, breath seemingly deep. Then, a deep sigh—a sigh that allowed him to let go of the tension. There was a visible change in his mood; a visible change in his demeanor.

"You're Harumi, right? The one at Ninjago Times?" Harumi gave him a cautious nod. "I've read some of your articles. The others tell me I shouldn't, but I do. I feel awful seeing the receiving end of our adventures. The day of the Great Devourer, I was petrified at the result around us. I got my uncle back, but many didn't." Lloyd sat down against the brick wall.

Harumi watched as his body relaxed further from its cool touch. Taking his mask off, she could see the tired look in his eyes. She saw the way his face dropped in turmoil. But, above all, she could see the sadness across his body. "But that's part of the job, you win some and you lose some." He looked up and gave her a sad smile. She felt bad for him. She paused at the sudden thought.

These were the same people who destroyed her childhood home; why in the world is she feeling bad for him? Her life had been completely normal. She was obsessed with the heroic team, much like any other child her age were. But the day of the Devourer changed so much for her. She remembered sitting at the ambulance; doctors and paramedics were running around trying to save as many people as they could. Her parents hadn't made it to the elevator with her.

She hadn't seen them since the door closed. She thought for sure they hadn't made it, and hadn't found a way out. From a distance, she heard her name called. At first she thought she had imagined it. But then it called again. It had been her parents. By some miracle, her parents had survived the falling building. Harumi had never felt so lucky, and hasn't since. Her parents were safe, but she saw how many more had lost theirs. That's why she chose to become a journalist, to show the damages done to their communities because of the Ninja and their so-called heroic actions.

"We're human too, you know." Harumi looked back toward the ninja in front of her.

"Most of you, anyways," she joked. Lloyd let out a cackle.

"Yeah, well, you got me there," he managed to chuckle out. Lloyd went to stand—to make his exit, she presumed. Harumi looked back toward the unconscious man beside them.

"What are you gonna do about him?" She pointed over at the man.

"I'll just call it in to the police, they'll handle it from here," Lloyd explained. "It was nice meeting you, Harumi. It's great being able to put a face to a name." She gave him a feeble smile. Still lost in thought, he made his leave and she was left alone in the alleyway. Looking at the time, she let out a heavy sigh and collected her things. Taking out her notepad, she began to note some thoughts down.

She remembered his remark of being human too. She laughed internally at his statement. Having done so much digging on the ninjas, she knew he wasn't entirely human. That was besides the point, however. He was hurting, and she saw that. She could see he was hiding behind his heroic facade. Harumi had noted his features and his body language. Being a journalist meant focusing on the small details. That also meant covering more than just one side. Harumi took out her phone, quickly looking for her mother's caller contact.

"Hey, mom, I'm going to be late tonight."

She once again did not get the headline. There was yet another snake invasion and obviously that took precedence over her "overly emotional" column, or rather that's what Gayle had said. Harumi honestly had no clue how she had managed to handle her over all of these years; she was reaching a tipping point and Gayle would be the first to suffer her wrath. If Harumi wasn't the only source of income in her household, she would have surely cursed her boss out for this terrible treatment. Gayle was obviously belittling her throughout the years and her co workers just sat and watched. Just wait, she was determined to get that headline, and then they would see who got the last laugh.

The walk home managed to match her sour mood. The sky began to cry as if to pity her, but she did not want its sympathy nor its tears. The streets were lulled in the process. As much as Ninjago was a walkable city, many refused to walk in the rain and would often opt to drive, maybe even stay home all together. Harumi remembered the night of the devourer, she remembered how the sky cried that day too, as if it once more felt the pain of the people. She thought back to her conversation with Lloyd and how much she had belittled them. How many terrible things she had written about them and it had taken a toll on their pride, their worthiness.

As much as she hated them, Lloyd had a point when he said they were human, regardless of how human. So lost in thought, Harumi hadn't noticed a looming figure standing near her door.

"Harumi," the figure called. Instantaneously, Harumi reached over to the figure and pinned it to the wall. Adrenaline coursed through her body as she kicked in the person's legs to further immobilize them. "Harumi, please," the person exclaimed. It was then Harumi took in the person's features and marked the signature green gi and leather shoulder guard.

"Lloyd!" Harumi immediately let go of the green ninja. "I would apologize, but I can't say I'd feel sorry," she snarked as she crossed her arms. "Can't say you didn't deserve it." She began to collect her scattered things from the wall—her bag could not catch a break. "What are you doing here?"

"I read your column," he stated as he handed her the umbrella she dropped. She paused at the mention of her column. Why was she surprised? He had said he read every single one of her publishings; she shouldn't feel as baffled as she is right now. She even could feel slightly embarrassed. Honestly, Harumi, get it together, she thought to herself.

"Did you now," she began to reach for the umbrella once more. She felt herself hesitate before grabbing it. Pull it together Harumi. He didn't yell at you for the previous stuff you wrote, why would he now?

"I just wanted to say thank you," he smiled.

"For writing what you did. I'm surprised it didn't make the front page." Harumi let out a frustrated cry at this. Lloyd was taken aback. He looked ready to apologize as if he had been in the wrong for complimenting her.

"You and your stupid ninja adventures somehow always make the front page," Harumi ranted. "It's no surprise that Gayle once more got the front page with her little 'fire snakes' story."

Throwing the umbrella in the bin with the rest of them, Harumi aggressively unlocked her home. "You would think that people are tired enough of hearing the adventures we witness with our eyes! You would expect people to actually want to read a sentimental story about their beloved ninja, but no!" With another frustrated grunt, Harumi hung her things by the door.

"Harumi, dear," a voice called from across the apartment. "Is that you?" A figure approached the doorway. "Oh! I see you brought a guest! I'll set out an extra plate!" Harumi turned around, remembering Lloyd was still there behind her.

"Uh, thanks, Mom," Harumi called back to her mother, who was long gone now. "Sorry, I just, I was really hoping to finally get the front page this time." Harumi sighed as she began to walk further into the apartment. She noticed Lloyd's footsteps didn't follow. Turning around once more, she asked him, "Are you coming in?" Cautiously, Lloyd began to step into the apartment.

"Alright, Green Ninja, no one is going to bite your head off." Harumi walked over to him and pulled him into the apartment, dragging him toward their breakfast nook.

"Rumi," her father called. "Finally joining us for dinner, I see," he teased. She greeted her father and leaned down to kiss his cheek.

"I brought a friend," she stated, motioning over to Lloyd. She watched as her father's eyes went wide.

"Green Ninja! It's an honor to have you in our house!" He went to shake Lloyd's hand, which Lloyd gladly took.

"The pleasure is mine," Lloyd smiled. Harumi's father motioned for the two of them to sit as her mother set down the food on the table.

"You're not allergic to anything, are you, dear?" Harumi's mother asked the ninja sitting at their table. He motioned with a shake of a head and her mother sat down with the rest of them. "Harumi, why don't you read your article to us?" Harumi looked up in shock. Her mother never usually asked her to read her work. She noticed the smug look on her face, and she knew why.

"Oh, yes! I loved reading it," her father exclaimed.

"Well, it is rather long, and I'm sure Lloyd here needs to get back to the monastery soon after he finishes eating," Harumi looked over to Lloyd for some kind of assistance, to which was a grave mistake.

"I have time," he blurted out. Harumi's face immediately fell into a frown, her face conveying her urge to strangle him right then and there.

"At least read the closing statement," her mother compromised. Harumi sighed and went to grab a newspaper nearby. Opening the page where her article was, she began to read her closing statement:

I realized that after all this time, I had been wrong about the ninja. There was something about our meeting that compelled me to write this; to tell the world I was wrong. As the Green Ninja had said, they were human, mostly. They each wanted to protect what was theirs. They all have their reasons for being a ninja, and we often overlook these reasons as we only see them as heroes. They aren't heroes, they're fighters. They fight for what they believe is right, even if that means sacrificing a few more bucks from our wallets and our typical work route. I may not still totally tolerate the ninja, but I've realized I may have looked at them from one broken lens, instead of the beautiful prism that many do to see the colors they shine on our world.

Biscila
2025

Lost Spirit of a Warrior

Written by Ray

Morro and his team were dragged to the queen's throne. Forced to kneel before her.

"Easy, you no-good son of a-" About to curse at one of the ghosts. But before Morro could finish, Archer put his hand on his shoulder. "Calm down, Morro. Cursing at them won't help us here." Archer mumbled, his voice heavy. Maybe even afraid of what would happen next.

Gritting his teeth, Morro's gaze shifted from Archer to the Preeminent, looming above them on her throne. Her glowing eyes watching him intently. Yeah, he failed. But he wasn't about to go down without a fight. "You were reckless, Morro." the Preeminent hissed. "And your recklessness has led to failure. That failure will cost you and your team dearly." Morro noticed his comrades shifting uneasily under her gaze. Archer's grip on Morro's shoulder tightened for a second before he let go. His breath, shallow. Even Ghoultar, who never followed the rules, had his head down. Bansha looked especially anxious, gripping her blade so tightly her knuckles turned pale.

"I take full responsibility," Morro said, his voice sharper than he intended. "This failure is on me. My team was just following orders." Narrowing her eyes, The Preeminent slowly leaned forward. "And yet, they followed you into failure. Loyalty to incompetence deserves punishment of its own."

Morro clenched his fists at his sides, his chest tightening. "Then punish me! Leave them out of this! They don't deserve your wrath, my queen" he nearly shouted. Barely holding himself together. The only result of his plea was the Preeminent methodical slow laughter. Deliberate, and cold. "Oh, Morro. You've always been reckless. A fool, blinded by your jealousy. I see no use for you anymore after this failure. But your pleas amuse me."

Despite the fear running through his veins, Morro stood his ground, though his fists trembled. "Amuse you or not, it's still my failure to bear. I beg you to spare them. Do whatever you want to me!" His voice cracked, betraying the confidence he was trying to show. "You dare argue with me?" the Preeminent snarled. Her resolve breaking in an instant. "Do you think I'm so weak as to let a follower dictate my judgment? No. There will be punishment for all of you."

Morro's heart sank as Archer shot him a glance. For once, Archer's usual calm, icy demeanour was gone. Replaced with pure fear. He opened his mouth to say something, but Morro gave him a warning glare. Not now. Not yet.

"I will banish you." the Preeminent continued. Her voice sharp and final. "All of you will carry the scars of this failure for eternity. You'll be marked, stripped of your titles, and cast out of my realm. Let it be known that failure is not tolerated."

Morro took a step forward, shaking his head in desperation. "Please-"

"Silence!" The Preeminent's roar cut through him like a blade. Everyone froze as silence filled the room. After a pause, she went on. "Since you're so desperate to carry this disgrace alone, I'll grant you one mercy: Banishment." "No!" Archer's voice rang out before he could stop himself but a glare from her stopped him in his tracks. "I'll banish you to the mortal realm. Alone. Perhaps there you will suffer the humiliation you deserve."

Stepping forward in despair, Archer's bow clattered to the ground as he dropped to his knees. Pleading. "My queen, please. If someone is to join him, let it be me! I failed too. I'll share his punishment!"

"Archer, stop."

Hissing through his teeth, Morro grabbed Archer by the collar. Yanking him close to whisper.

"Don't argue with her! Do you want to make this worse?" His voice was sharp, but desperation laced every word. Despite that, Archer ignored him. Only turning to Morro with remorse. His eyes glistened with unshed tears "You may have led the mission, but I didn't do enough. I should've stopped the ninja. If you go, I go."

The Preeminent laughed again, mocking them. "You ghosts and your foolish loyalty. How... touching. But your pleas mean nothing. You'll all bear your marks, but only Morro will face banishment. Do not test my patience further."

Archer's eyes widened like saucers, ready to plead once more if not for Morro's panicked words echoing through his head. Stopping him from speaking out once more. "I can't let you go alone.." Archer whispered. "You have to." Morro snapped back. His tone softened for a moment. "Please. Don't make this worse for either of us, brother." He paused, then added, "Promise me you won't do anything stupid. Protect Bansha and Ghoultar."

"But-"

"Promise me!" Morro's voice cracked, and even though reluctant Archer finally nodded. "Thank you.." Morro muttered, right before one of the other ghosts forced him to the ground.

He struggled as they brought something forward. A stamp out of Deepstone. Just the sight of it is enough to make his heart skip a beat.

“Hey!” he yelled, and shortly after it was pressed against him, and the pain shot through his body, dragging out a scream. The same fate met his comrades as they were marked one by one.

When it was over, Morro crumpled to the ground, trembling. His vision blurred with tears as he gasped for air. The ghost holding him down released him and stepped back.

Through the haze, Morro’s eyes found Archer, who was just as beaten down. His gaze then dropped to Archer’s bow, still lying on the ground where it had fallen. Instinctively, Morro reached out to grab it, only to be stopped inches before his fingers could latch on. “Archer..” he mumbled. His vision fading in and out of darkness as he struggles to get one last look at his commards.

Morro drew a shaky breath and dragged himself forward, inch by painful inch, until his hand brushed against the bow. His fingers curled around the grip, trembling.

“Get him out of my sight.” the Preeminent hissed.

Two ghosts grabbed Morro and started dragging him away.

“Morro!” Archer cried, breaking free and grabbing hold of him with what strength he had left.

“Let go, Archer..” Morro whispered weakly, but Archer merely shook his head and held on for as long as he could. Until eventually he was pulled off. Away from the one brother he's always adored and now might never see again. Forced to watch as Morro was dragged, and then... cast away to the mortal realm.

“Morro!” Archer and the others screamed as they watched him disappear

———

Morro’s body hit the pavement hard, the force of the portal’s closing gust scattering dust and debris around him. The cold, solid ground beneath him was a stark contrast to the eerie, weightless existence of the Cursed Realm. A sharp pain tore through his limbs, a constant reminder of his banishment.Tthe Deepstone’s mark still burning, itched onto his skin like a scar of failure.

For a long while, he didn’t move. The sound of the city buzzed faintly around him. Distant sirens, hurried footsteps, voices chattering, completely oblivious to the ghost who had fallen from another realm.

He was alone.

A broken breath escaped his lips as he pushed himself onto his elbows before he broke down again. Cursing underneath his breath before he tried again, this time able to get himself into a sitting position through painstaking effort. Never in his life would Morro have thought that sitting up would cost him that much energy. With a pounding head, and blurry vision he tried to make sense of his surroundings. Tall buildings loomed over him, their neon lights flickering in the night.

Ninjago City.

He recognized it instantly. Though it had changed since the last time he had been here. Before his death. Before he had run away from the monastery. Before... The Preeminent had banished him. Gritting his teeth, he forced himself to his feet, gripping the wall of the alleyway for support. His entire spiritual body hurt, exhaustion weighing him down like chains. But worse than the pain was the emptiness gnawing at his chest. His team was gone.

His brother was gone. He had nothing. For all his arrogance, all his power, all his relentless pursuit of a destiny that was promised by his own sensei... What had it all led to?

Failure.

He stumbled forward, pulling his hood over his head, emerging from the alley into the streets. People brushed past him without a second glance, too caught up in their own lives to notice the fallen ghost in their midst. He wasn’t surprised. He had been reduced to nothing more than a shadow, someone who wasn’t worth remembering after what he did. So he did the same. Too occupied by his own thoughts to worry about others. Until... he saw them

The ninjas.

Ducking behind a corner instinctively, Morro’s breath hitching. They were in the midst of a battle, possibly a damn enemy of theirs he wasn’t aware of. But something was different this time. Something was off.

Morro’s chest tightened. The Green Ninja, the one who had taken the destiny that should have been his. The one he had possessed, fought, envied. Even now, watching him from the shadows, that old resentment clawed at Morro’s mind.

Yet it seems, Lloyd wasn’t the same naive boy Morro had once possessed. He seemed stronger, more of a leader, yet still carrying the weight of a lot of responsibility on his shoulders than he ought to be. Morro could see it in his movements. The way he led his team, the way he fought not just with skill, but with purpose.

And Morro?

Morro had nothing.

For the first time in his existence, he wasn't sure what he wanted. Revenge? No, that wasn't it. What good would it do? He had lost everything already. Power? He had wielded power before, and it had led him to ruin.

What now when he has literally nothing? In an attempt to clear his head, he turned away.

Too anxious to even begin to form a plan. For once in his life, he was completely clueless on what to do. Walking away, from the battle, from his thoughts, from his old life that he had just been banished from.

Stepping back into the darkness of the alley but still his mind was plagued, the questions lingered, haunting him with every step he took into the unknown. If he was no longer the Preeminent's servant, no longer a ghost of vengeance, then what was he? And could he ever find the answer? Morro was unsure, how could he know? He was alone, and he would be for a long while if not forever now.

For the night, Morro had enough of everything, he was exhausted. He tried looking for somewhere he could rest, but it was difficult, mostly because Morro didn't plan on interacting with the humans. He made it easy for himself and created a small shelter on one of the rooftops of one of the taller buildings in the city. It wasn't much, just some bricks and pieces of metal he gathered together with what strength he had left, but it gave him a place to disappear. Somewhere quiet. Somewhere no one would look for him.

Since that night, Morro often watched the ninja fight, either facing new villains or delivering low-life criminals to the cops. And each time, his eyes lingered on Lloyd. Jealousy still lived in him, quietly, like a stubborn flame that refused to die, each time he snarled when he saw Lloyd. But over time, that fire dimmed. He began to realize that the destiny of the Green Ninja was never his to begin with, that his fight for it that led him to ruin was for nothing. It had led him to lose everything. His team. His title. His brother.

His brother...

The ache was unbearable some nights. The way Archer had held onto him before they were torn apart replayed in his mind like a damn curse. He'd trade anything. Power, pride, even his name! just to go back to that moment and hold on tighter, to have let Archer come with him, but instead he had pushed him away.. but he knew that it was for Archer's own safety, or at least he hoped it was..

———

Slowly the nights grew longer and colder, few autumn leaf's falling to the ground with grace

Morro wandered the alleys and backstreets of Ninjago City like the ghost he was, with no ties, no purpose, and no future. At least Morro thought so. He watched chaos unfold more than once: fires, robberies, reckless drivers, even the occasional Skulkin or Serpentine stirring trouble. The heroes of Ninjago kept things in check well enough. They always showed up just in time to save the city.

Until one night... they didn't.

A fire had erupted in a large apartment complex just before midnight. Morro had been drifting near the district when he noticed the thick smoke curling into the sky. His first instinct was to leave, to disappear into the shadows and let the living deal with their own disasters.

But he didn't.

He stood there for a while. A part of him screamed to just turn away. To let the humans deal with it like they always did. But another part, buried deep inside him, was louder.

"You can do something."

And for once, Morro listened.

He broke through the back of the building with a blast of wind, coughing as the thick smoke hit his face, he looked inside before storming in. He moved through the halls like a blur, going from apartment to apartment and from room to room, helping the people, guiding them out, covering their mouths with cloth so they wouldn't inhale the smoke, kicking open doors and shielding children with his own body as the ceiling threatened to collapse.

He breathed for a moment when he thought everyone was out until he heard a scream for help, he looked back inside, listening in closely. "Help!!" There he heard it again.

He rushed back in before the ceiling collapsed behind him. Blocking the exit, for a second he looked back before he continued to run toward the voice, pushing through the smoke and flames.

He found a terrified child. Backed into a corner, surrounded by fire. He looked at the child, frozen. images of his younger self, way before he ended up in the monastery flashing before his eyes, he shook it off. He had no time to waste in this situation

Quickly, Morro put on his mask and summoned a gust of wind, forcing the fire back just enough to reach the child. He scooped them into his arms, scanning the area for another way out. But he was met with nothing. No exit in sight. With the first floor sealed off, he had to improvise. The fire licked at them. Like wispy hands out to grab them.

Morro had to act fast. His mind screamed at him. To think. To run. To do… SOMETHING.

He ran upstairs, catching a few burns as he shielded the child, forcing away the flames with the wind where he could. On the second floor, he spotted a window and sprinted toward it. He leapt.

Landing hard but on his feet, he immediately set the child down before backing away. The parents rushed to their kid, pulling them into a tearful hug. However, when they turned to thank the man who had saved their child, he was already gone.

By the time the ninja arrived, there was nothing left to save. Only a burnt-out structure and a crowd of confused, coughing survivors who had no idea of who just saved them. From a rooftop nearby, Morro watched. A strange feeling stirred in his chest; not pride, not glory, but something deeper.

Relief.

For the first time in… maybe forever, he had done something… right. After that night, he kept doing it. Quietly. Secretly. When the ninja couldn't make it in time, Morro did. He never let himself be seen. A trapped construction worker. A child about to be hit by a runaway truck. A woman cornered in an alley by thieves. He appeared. He saved them. Then he vanished like smoke in the wind. And each time he saved someone, he remembered his sensei's teachings, that he should protect those who cannot protect themselves.

People started whispering about a shadowy figure, some kind of ghost who acted as guardian. The ninja investigated, of course, but Morro stayed careful, never to be known. But no matter how many people he saved, something still felt… incomplete. There was an emptiness inside him, a constant pull. Like his soul was reaching for something he couldn't touch.

Like he was supposed to save someone else.

One night, standing atop the same rooftop where he'd first taken shelter, Morro looked up at the stars, wind tugging at his cloak. He didn't know how long it'd been since he was banished in the mortal realm. First Morro had thought it was a punishment, but instead it was a chance of redemption for him, a second chance, however accidental.

Morro sighed, "what if this was my true destiny all along?" he asked himself, But his voice faltered until it was only a mere whisper under his breath. He remembered the pain of the Deepstone brand. The sorrow in Archer's voice. The last look they shared…

His gaze drifted up toward the night sky, watching the stars, wondering how his friends were, how his brother was.. They were still in the Cursed Realm. Still marked. And likely … still suffering.

...And for a moment the world stood still as if holding its breath to see which side would seize victory...

Which fate would come out on top...

twisted fates

Lloyd

twisted fates

Harumi

twisted fates

First Spinjitsu Master

twisted fates

Wu & Garmadon

twisted fates

Misaka

twisted fates

Misaka

twisted fates

Kai

twisted fates

Lloyd

twisted fates

Zane

twisted fates

Jay

twisted fates

Mya

twisted fates

Tale

twisted fates

Pixal

twisted fates

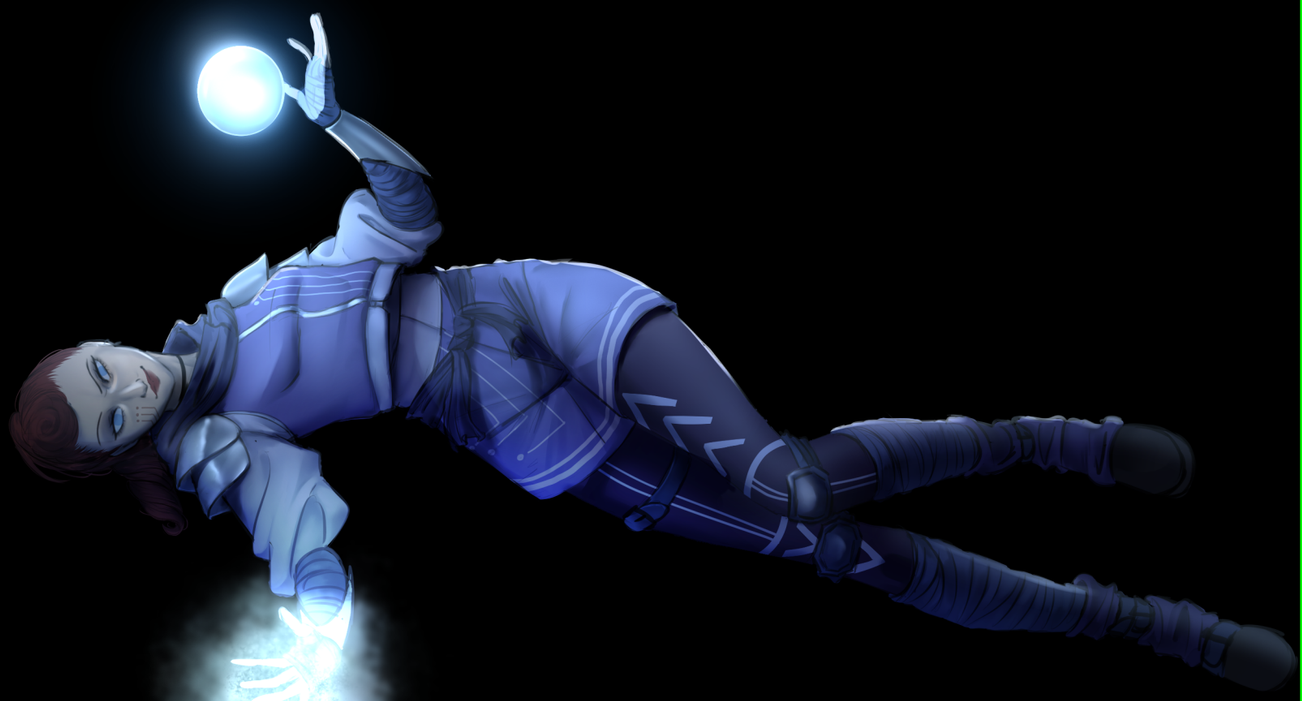
Akita

twisted fates

Ylania

twisted fates

Ylancelis



Jordana

twisted fates

Kora

twisted fates

twisted fates

Skylor

twisted fates

Overlord

twisted fates

Pythor

twisted fates

Garmadon

twisted fates

Mechanic

twisted fates

Clause

twisted fates

Harumi

twisted fates

Aspheera

twisted fates

Veronix

twisted fates

Krux

twisted fates

Marro

And so we approach the end...

A big thank you to everyone who downloaded this zine! All of our contributors worked hard on creating artworks or stories that resonate with the theme of the zine and we sincerely hope that you enjoyed it! Please make sure to check out all of the talented creators who helped us bring this zine to life!

Additionally we would like to thank all of our contributors who helped us all the way to the end! Every piece turned out absolutely incredible and filled us with great excitement! We hope that everyone had fun and thank you all so much for your support and patience!

Lastly, a big thank you to all of the mods who helped with the organisation and the creation process! The Head mod couldn't have done it without you so thank you so much for your trust and hard work! Even amidst stressful real life situations we managed to navigate so thank you for your effort and time!

- Sincerely, the Head mod

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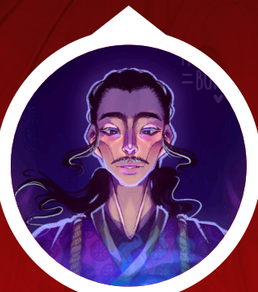

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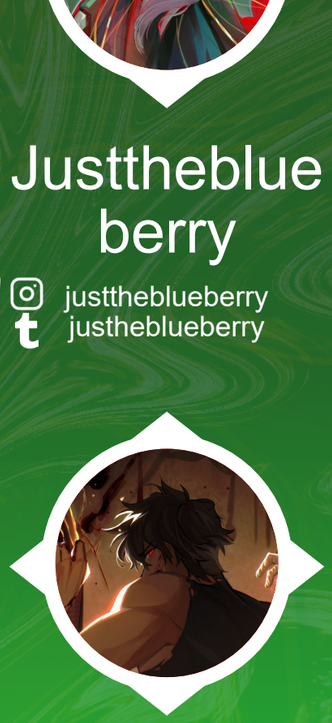

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Jweeps

Usachxxn

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Sircilly

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Marsipain

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